DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 799 SP 008 684

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TITLE An Approach to Competency-Based Teacher Preparation in Early Childhood Education.
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Early Childhood Education; *Humanistic Education; *Performance Based Teacher Education; *Teaching Skills

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses an approach to competency-based teacher education whose goal is the development of early childhood education teachers who have the requisite knowledge, attitudes, and skills for facilitating children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development and who are well-informed, creative, flexible, open to experience, responsible for themselves and others, and guided by positive goals. Toward this goal, 15 competencies are proposed. To provide students with opportunities for the development of these competencies, the following areas of study are recommended: (a) self-understanding for teachers, (b) child development, (c) the young child in his environment, (d) language arts, (e) literature for young children, (f) reading skills in early childhood education, (g) the expressive arts in early childhood education, and (h) teacher/parent relationship. In conclusion, the author states that humanism is crucial to teacher effectiveness and that a good competency-based program must offer each student opportunities to become a whole person. (PD)

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ED-100799

AN APPROACH TO COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHER PREPARATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

As an outgrowth of demands for teacher accountability in education, there has developed a strong movement toward competency-based teacher education and certification. The purpose of teacher preparation programs has always been the development of competent teachers -- this is not new. What is new is the call for reformulation of preparatory programs in terms that delineate specifically the kinds of performances considered basic to effective teaching, that specify strategies designed to provide for their development, and that spell out assessment techniques to measure attainment of the specific performances. A major change in certification procedures is also being called for. Instead of being based on the kinds of college courses taken and the number of credits earned, competency-based certification would depend upon the demonstrated achievement of specified competencies.

In our view, this reformulation of teacher preparation and certification must take a "holistic or global" approach[1] rather than one based solely upon discrete behaviors. The goal should be the development of teachers who have the requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills for facilitating children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, and who, in addition to being well-informed, are "creative, flexible, open to experience, responsible for themselves and others, and guided by positive goals and purposes."[2] Toward this end, the following competencies are proposed as appropriate for teachers of young children.

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The prospective teacher should be able to state objectives upon which an educational program for young children in a democratic society may be based.

The prospective teacher should be able to articulate a philosophy of early childhood education.

The prospective teacher should have an understanding and acceptance of himself as a person and an awareness of his attitudes toward and relationships with others.

The prospective teacher should be able to identify and describe the stages of social, emotional, and intellectual development of children from birth through eight years of age according to specific theories of personality and intellectual development.

The prospective teacher should be able to describe the impact of societal factors on a young child's school experience.

The prospective teacher should be able to describe the teacher's role in fostering intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development.

The prospective teacher should be able to assess individual differences in intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development.

The prospective teacher should be able to articulate criteria for selecting appropriate curriculum content, methods, and materials for nursery, kindergarten, and primary grade children.

The prospective teacher should be able to plan safe, appropriate early childhood environments using space, equipment, and materials to foster intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development consonant with developmental theory.

The prospective student should be able to integrate mathematics, science, social studies, reading, language arts, and expressive arts into a cohesive educational program.

The prospective teacher should be able to plan for individuals and for groups of children, both for short range and for longer periods.

The prospective teacher should be able to plan a program for parent involvement and for home-school cooperation.

The prospective teacher should be able to identify educational resources in the community and describe some ways of using these.

The prospective teacher should be able to analyze and critique existing programs for children, using educational objectives, developmental theory, and educational philosophy as criteria.

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> The prospective teacher should be able to demonstrate behaviors which support cognitive and affective development of children during college field work and student teaching situations.

To provide students with opportunities for the development of these competencies, the following areas of study are proposed.

Self-Understanding for Teachers: In order to help young children develop self-understanding and self-acceptance, teachers themselves must have a positive feeling of self. As Combs has noted, "The production of effective teachers will require helping each student to explore and discover his personal meanings about subject matter, people, purposes, and learning, about methods and about himself."[3] Opportunities should be provided within the framework of the teacher's preparatory program for such experiences.

Child Development: Since an understanding of the total development of young children is necessary for planning and implementing appropriate educational programs, a study of child development is basic to the teacher's preparation. This should include study of the normal growth and development of children from birth through eight years of age: physical, emotional, social, and intellectual aspects of development and the roles of endowment, maturation, environment, and experience. Research findings and their implications for the education of young children should be studied, with particular attention to the contributions of Piaget, Erikson, Isaacs, among others.

The Young Child in His Environment: Since societal factors have a strong and multi-faceted impact on a young child's school experience, an understanding of these factors is crucial. This entails study of the educational implications of the style and content of the young child's daily life in his particular environment (urban, suburban, rural), including the role of significant adults at home and at school. Physical, psychological,

environmental, and cultural factors as they affect his attitudes, behavior, and learning are important understandings for teachers. The experiences, feelings, values, strengths, and needs of young children, as influenced by their backgrounds, should be explored in relation to program development and instructional practices of the teacher.

Language Arts: Language development is a pivotal aspect of the total development of the young child. The teacher must understand her role in providing appropriate opportunities for extending and enriching the language with which the child comes to school. For such understanding, study of language development as it relates to intellectual, social, and emotional growth in young children is important. The interrelationship of listening, speaking, writing, and reading and ways in which teachers may facilitate development in these areas should be stressed.

Literature for Young Children: Good literature enriches children's lives in many ways. Read for information, for pleasure, for the deepening understanding of a mood or concept, or for the aesthetic experience of poetry, literature may extend self-understanding and the understanding of others. It may contribute to the development of imagination, sensitivity, and values, and provide language experiences of high quality. Young children "will learn early to look to literature for truth and wisdom as well as for aesthetic impact, with respectful curiosity for the many faces of the human relationship and the foibles and wonders of man..."[4] It is important for prospective teachers to be familiar with the broad range of literary material for young children and to develop and use appropriate criteria for evaluation and selection.

Reading Skills in Early C..dhood Education: There is overwhelming concern and continuing controversy regarding the pros and cons of early

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reading instruction, the suitability of different approaches and methodologies, and the variety of programs whose developers claim are the "solution to the reading problem." Teachers have to be able to make knowledgeable decisions in regard to the many, and often contradictory, claims made by the protagonists of various points of view. They need an understanding of the nature of reading and the reading process, and of the numerous factors involved (physical, perceptual, intellectual, language, emotional, social, and school factors). Competency in the teaching of specific reading skills in developmental sequences appropriate for individual children should be developed through a study of theory and practice related to the development of pre-reading and reading skills in nursery school, kindergarten, and the primary grades. Diagnostic and corrective teaching competencies should also be developed.

Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies in Early Childhood Education: To bring order to the understanding of their physical and social world, young children need opportunities for direct experiences with people and things, and help in interpreting their experiences. Prospective teachers should become knowledgeable about appropriate objectives, content, methods, and materials for helping children develop modes of inquiry, critical thinking, problem-solving techniques, and values, as well as concepts and skills -- all of which constitute the substance of mathematics, science and social learning. The role of the teacher in facilitating children's development in these areas should be considered along with ways of integrating subject matter content with other areas of the program, stressing concrete, first-hand experiences and learning through discovery.

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The Expressive Arts in Early Childhood Education: Children need opportunities for free, creative expression of their ideas and feelings in their own unique and personal styles, and in non-verbal as well as verbal modes. The teacher must provide an environment which is aesthetic as well as emotionally safe, in order to foster such expression. She must offer many opportunities, a variety of media, support, and guidance in order to facilitate a growing perception and control in the use of media. Suggested for prospective teachers is a multidisciplinary approach to music, movement, and art experiences, with stress on ways of providing opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and personal expression as well as for perceptual and motor development.

Working with Parents: Positive relationships between parents and teachers, between home and school, are vital in providing for harmony and continuity in the lives of young children. In order to foster such relationships, prospective teachers need to learn ways of working with parents for mutual understanding and support. Helping parents to become aware of the goals, content, and values of the early childhood education program is one aspect of teacher-parent interaction. Prospective teachers must learn ways of sharing insights and information about individual children and about young children in general, and about the contributions parents can make to the teacher's understanding of particular children and of children in a given community. In addition, they must learn techniques of involving parents in their programs: parent-teacher meetings and workshops, discussion groups, conferences, written communications.

Although, for purposes of clarity and discussion, specific competencies and areas of study have been treated separately, a holistic approach is considered by the writers to be basic to sound teacher preparation. Opportunity

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must be provided in the program for integrating into a coherent whole insights, content, and methods so that they do not remain isolated segments. This would include consideration of appropriate goals, development of a philosophy of early childhood education, and the role of play in the total development of the young child.

Organization of the school environment in terms of space, equipment, time, age groupings, and personnel patterns, as well as integration of subject matter must be considered. Since planning for individual, small groups, and total groups on both short range and long range bases is an important teacher function, skill in observing children and keeping records should be developed toward this end. Prospective teachers, in addition to learning ways of relating effectively to parents, must learn to use community resources as a means of providing continuity in the life of a young child.

A multi-faceted field work component should be part of the entire ongoing teacher preparation program so that theory and practice can be meaningfully me hed. In addition to field work relating to curriculum and teaching, it is suggested that students have practical experiences which might include home visits, parent conferences, and involvement with community agencies.

Developers of particular teacher preparation programs may wish to break down further the competencies delineated in this article, detailed according to their views. Strategies for achieving competencies would also be determined by program developers. Possibilities in this regard include traditional courses, instructional modules, independent study, field work, or any combination of these.

Assessment techniques are another aspect to be considered in relation

to competency-based teacher education. These may vary from one competency to another, and from one program to another, but in all instances should be evaluated and refined with experience.

Our overriding concern is that teacher education programs do not become primarily interested and involved in minutiae, leading to a fragmented approach. A good competency-based program must offer each student the needed opportunities to grow toward becoming a "whole teacher" for "whole children". Attributes such as wisdom, sensitivity, kindness, supportiveness, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity and for change, spontaneity, creativity, and a sense of humor are vital for teachers of young children. Although these cannot be taught per se, programs of teacher education must strive to nurture these. We must be wary of adopting an "engineering approach," a charge often leveled by critics of the concept of competency-based teacher education. Humanism is crucial to teacher effectiveness. It must be paramount when planning for teacher development.

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Footnotes

[1]Arthur W. Combs, Educational Accountability: Beyond Behavioral Objectives. Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1972, p. 12.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Arthur W. Combs, The Professional Education of Teachers. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965, p. 28

[4]Leland B. Jacobs, ed., Using Literature with Young Children. New York: Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965, p. 5.